



Citizen Participation Plan  
for the  
Montana DNRC Forested Trust Lands  
Habitat Conservation Plan and  
Environmental Impact Statement

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## **I. Introduction**

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) jointly designed this Citizen Participation Plan (CPP) to promote continued information dissemination and disclosure of the processes used in the development of the Montana DNRC Forested Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). The plan also identifies opportunities for citizen participation. Interested individuals and groups are encouraged to learn about the HCP and participate in the identified participation activities.

## **II. Citizen Participation Objectives**

The HCP Planning Team aims to develop cooperative communication with interested parties regarding issues of concern. Specifically, the objectives of the CPP for the HCP/EIS are to:

- ❑ Ensure that interested parties receive accurate, timely information that clearly identifies the scope and purpose of the HCP/EIS throughout the life of the project.
- ❑ Promote an understanding of the technical aspects of the project and the full range of potential effects.
- ❑ Provide opportunities for interested parties to voice concerns or opinions and to ask questions. Provide opportunities for HCP Planning Team to receive and understand the concerns of interested parties. Provide opportunities for HCP Planning Team to receive and understand ideas or information that may improve the plan or planning process.
- ❑ Clearly communicate what type of input is requested at each stage and explain how that input will be used.
- ❑ Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and the Montana Environmental Policy Act.
- ❑ Develop and maintain agency credibility in the eyes of interested parties.

## **III. Interested Parties**

The HCP/EIS will involve a wide range of interested parties. The Planning Team seeks to foster cooperative relationships and encourage meaningful citizen participation. The following subsections generally describe each interested entity and identify citizen participation tools and activities that may be particularly effective with the specific group.

### **A. General Public**

The general public is used in this context to describe individuals that have interest in trust lands issues but are not affiliated with organized groups. This may include citizens of communities in close proximity to HCP-covered lands or recreational users. The media, periodic updates via the project mailing list and the project

website shall be utilized in communication with the general public. Briefings, presentations, public meetings and/or roundtable discussions may also occur at appropriate stages in the planning process.

**B. Trust Beneficiaries**

The HCP Planning Team recognizes the importance of trust land management to trust beneficiaries. These interested parties would not only be informed about the HCP/EIS process, objectives, proposed actions, and potential effects, but would also have opportunities to comment and to feel that their perspective will be considered. The media, periodic updates via the project mailing list and the project website shall be utilized in communication with trust beneficiaries. Briefings, presentations, public meetings and/or roundtable discussions may also occur at appropriate stages in the planning process.

**C. Interested Groups**

A variety of organized groups including industry associations, environmental organizations and hunting and angling groups may have interest in the development of the HCP and EIS. The media, periodic updates via the project mailing list and the project website shall be utilized in communication with interested groups. Briefings, presentations, public meetings and/or roundtable discussions may also occur at appropriate stages in the planning process.

**D. Tribal Governments**

DNRC and USFWS will work cooperatively with affected Native American groups. Early tribal participation is encouraged in the HCP planning process. The Planning Team will solicit information and traditional knowledge in an effort to incorporate insight from tribal governments. This is particularly important where HCP planning process may affect tribal trust resources or the exercise of tribal rights. By incorporating tribal involvement into the HCP/EIS process, the USFWS will comply with Secretarial Order #3206: American Indian Tribal Rights, Federal-Tribal Trust Responsibilities, and the Endangered Species Act (June 5, 1997). The media, periodic updates via the mailing list and the project website shall be utilized in communication with tribal groups. Meetings, presentations and/or roundtable discussions with tribal governments may also occur at appropriate stages in the planning process.

**E. Elected Officials and Local Governments**

It is essential that elected officials and local governments are informed throughout the HCP/EIS planning process to ensure continued support of land management activities and effective representation of constituents. Information shall be disseminated to members of the Land Board, Montana's Governor; Montana's Senators and US House Representative; County Commissioners and other elected officials throughout the planning process via periodic updates and the project website. Briefings and presentations with elected officials and local governments may also occur at appropriate stages in the planning process.

**F. Media**

The media is essential in broadly disseminating information to the public. Press releases, public service announcements, and briefings are cost-effective means of distributing information and stimulating citizen participation. Because of the importance of disseminating consistent, accurate, and timely information, an HCP Project Manager will coordinate all two-way media contact.

**G. Federal and State Agencies**

All Federal or state agencies that are potentially affected by the HCP, or that have regulatory and statutory authorities over resources impacted by the HCP will be included in HCP communications and project mailings. In particular, it is important for agencies managing adjacent lands to communicate with the HCP Planning Team to promote coordinated landscape-level management that better supports the conservation and/or recovery of listed and unlisted species. Agencies that would be affected by implementation of the HCP shall be provided copies of draft and final documents and will encouraged to comment at the designated opportunities.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) shall be informed of HCP progress and included in HCP communication and mailings. In addition, MFWP biologists will provide technical peer review of the draft conservation strategies. Members of the HCP Planning Team will meet with MFWP staff to provide project updates at critical points in the HCP/EIS process.

The United States Forest Service (USFS) Northern Region Directors of the Watersheds; Wildlife, Fish and Rare Plants; and Fire and Aviation Programs shall be informed of HCP progress. The program directors shall be included in HCP communication and mailings. Members of the HCP Planning Team may also attend USFS staff meetings, upon invitation, to provide project updates at critical points in the HCP/EIS process.

**H. DNRC Staff**

It is vital that DNRC employees are up to date with the HCP/EIS process. All DNRC trust lands staff are to be informed of the HCP/EIS project status by their representatives on the HCP Planning Team. Staff will also receive project updates through email messages with links to the project website and project mailings.

Input from DNRC Staff shall be solicited throughout the project to ensure that the HCP Planning Team and DNRC decision makers have appropriate information. Presentations, group meetings, and other interactions with DNRC employees will be held with members of the HCP Planning Team to ensure effective communication throughout the project.

**I. USFWS Staff**

USFWS staff are assigned to provide technical assistance in planning the HCP and oversee the development of the EIS. It is important for those directly involved

in the project to maintain communication with the extended state, regional, and national USFWS staff and administrators. This will be primarily accomplished through periodic briefing statements that are distributed to the Field Offices and Regional Office. In addition, individual staff members will become engaged in the project where their expertise is most beneficial to the project. The USFWS Project Manager assigned to the HCP will maintain project-level coordination with other USFWS staff. Finally, the project website will be an important communication tool.

#### **IV. Citizen Participation Tools and Activities**

It is important that both internal and external communications regarding the HCP/EIS are consistent, accurate, timely, and target appropriate audiences. The primary means of communication are HCP project mailings, the project website and press releases. There are a number of other citizen participation tools and activities that may also be implemented in the course of the HCP/EIS process.

##### **A. Website**

The HCP project website shall be a key public involvement tool. The project website provides information about the HCP/EIS including project history, timelines, scheduled events and other information. Project documents will also be available on the website. Website updates will correspond with project milestones such as review of the preliminary strategies, release the DEIS and FEIS and publishing of the ROD. A link on the project website will allow interested parties to be added to the official project email or mailing distribution list.

##### **B. Mailing Distribution List**

The project mailing list is a comprehensive listing of all potentially interested parties. The mailing list shall aid in the consistent dissemination of information about the HCP/EIS process. The mailing list will be updated with new contact information obtained throughout the project. Projects mailings will correspond with project milestones such as review of the preliminary strategies, release the of DEIS and FEIS and publishing of the ROD. The public libraries of Missoula, Bozeman, Kalispell and Helena shall be included in the mailing distribution list and will receive copies of HCP documents. All materials distributed through the project mailing list will also be accessible on the project website. A link on the project website will allow interested parties to be added to the official project email or mailing distribution list.

##### **C. Press Releases**

Press releases shall be developed by the HCP Project Managers and will correspond with project milestones such as review of the preliminary strategies, release the DEIS and FEIS and publishing of the ROD. Press releases will also be posted on the project website.

##### **D. Public Meetings, Presentations and Discussions**

Public briefings, presentations, meetings, and/or roundtable discussions may occur at appropriate stages in the planning process. All activities shall convey

consistent messages tied to the citizen participation objectives outlined in Section II. In addition, citizen participation shall be developed in accordance with MEPA/NEPA requirements but may also occur at the request of interested parties.

**E. Contacts for Potentially Affected/Interested Parties**

The HCP Project Managers are the primary contacts for interested parties. Mike O'Herron is the DNRC Project Manager; he can be reached via email at [moherron@mt.gov](mailto:moherron@mt.gov) and by phone at (406) 542-4302. Lowell Whitney is the USFWS Project Manager; he can be reached via email at [lwhitney@mt.gov](mailto:lwhitney@mt.gov) and by phone at (406) 542-4330.

**V. NEPA and MEPA Compliance**

Under section 10 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Incidental Take Permit issuance represents a federal action and is therefore subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The NEPA process ensures the analysis of all environmental factors and effects on the human environment, which will be accomplished through the development of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS includes analysis of a range of reasonable alternatives including the proposed HCP. NEPA also requires federal agencies to utilize public participation in planning and implementation of all actions.

State land management decisions require DNRC to comply with the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). MEPA administrative rules allow for the preparation of a single EIS that complies with both MEPA and NEPA when state and federal agencies engage in joint projects. Therefore, the EIS developed to analyze the impacts of the proposed HCP will represent a joint NEPA and MEPA document. The decision to select a proposed alternative will culminate in separate Record of Decision (ROD) documents by the USFWS and DNRC.

**VI. Overview of the HCP/EIS Planning Process and Opportunities for Citizen Participation**

The public review process represents a continuum of citizen participation. Below is a tentative timeline for the HCP/EIS; specific dates for participation activities and comment periods shall be identified on the project website. Asterisks represent opportunities for citizen participation, though interested parties are free to contact the Project Managers at any time during the HCP and EIS development process.

- ❑ Federal Register Notice of Intent to Prepare an HCP/EIS, initiate scoping, and hold public meetings, April 28, 2003
- ❑ Public scoping period, April 28, 2003 through May 28, 2003\*\*
- ❑ Public scoping meetings, April 28, 2003 (Helena), April 29, 2003 (Bozeman), May 12, 2003 (Kalispell), May 13, 2003 (Missoula)\*\*

- ❑ Development and negotiation of species based conservation commitments, August 2002 through March 2005
- ❑ 45-Day public review and comment on the draft conservation strategies, meetings with interested parties upon request, Spring 2005 \*\*
- ❑ Preparation of Draft HCP/EIS and Draft Implementation Agreement (IA), Spring 2005 through late 2006
- ❑ Federal Register Notice of Availability of Receipt of an ITP Application, the Draft HCP/EIS, and Draft IA, Late 2006
- ❑ 90-Day public review and comment on the Draft HCP/EIS, public meetings and/or roundtable discussions, Late 2006\*\*
- ❑ Federal register notice of availability of the Final HCP/EIS, response to public comments and Implementation Agreement, Early 2008
- ❑ Posting and release of DNRC and USFWS Record of Decision, Early 2008
- ❑ 30-Day waiting and public comment period, Early 2008 \*\*
- ❑ Federal register notice of availability of the ROD, Early 2008

## **VII. Project Schedule**

The current project schedule, including specific dates of citizen participation opportunities, will be posted on the website at all times.

## **VIII. Citizen Participation Opportunities**

### **A. Public Scoping**

Public scoping for the Montana DNRC Forested Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) commenced with publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on April 28, 2003. A scoping brochure was distributed to individuals, private businesses, non-governmental organizations, and agencies that were included in Montana DNRC and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service distribution lists. Invitations to attend public scoping meetings were advertised in local newspapers. The public scoping meetings were held during the evenings on April 28, 2003 (Helena), April 29, 2003 (Bozeman), May 12, 2003 (Kalispell), and May 13, 2003 (Missoula). Public comment was solicited at the meetings and comments were also received in writing throughout the scoping period. The formal scoping period ended on June 23, 2003.



**B. Draft Conservation Strategy Review**

Prior to the development of the Draft HCP/EIS, the draft conservation strategies will be distributed for public review and comment. Comments may be submitted to the website or by conventional mail. A series of internal DNRC and public meetings may be held during this time. Presentations, meetings and/or roundtable discussions are designed to clearly define the major environmental issues and potential impacts of the draft strategies. Input received during this period will be utilized in the development of alternatives to be considered in the Draft HCP/EIS.

**C. Draft HCP/EIS Review and Comment**

A 90-day review and comment period will commence following the publication and distribution of the Draft HCP/EIS. Internal and public comments will be utilized in the development of Final EIS/HCP and selection of the preferred alternative. In accordance with NEPA and MEPA, written responses to the comments on the Draft HCP/EIS will be prepared and distributed. Comments and responses will also be posted on the project website.

**D. Final HCP/EIS Review and Comment**

Following the publication and distribution of the Final HCP/EIS, a 30-day comment period will be held to generate feedback on the Final HCP/EIS and preferred alternative. Comments collected during this period will be documented as part of the administrative record for the project and possibly included in the in appendices to the ROD.